

KELVIN ONONGHA

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## Footholds and Strongholds

At creation God made humans in His image and likeness, endowing them with powers and abilities akin to their Creator. One distinguishing quality which humans alone possessed, unique from all other creatures, was the power of choice—the will. This unique attribute made humans the only creatures with the ability to say yes or no to God. Since the devil’s fall from glory, it has been his mission to deceive and enlist others in his rebellion against the sovereignty of God. Continuing the work of deception and rebellion he began in heaven before he and his confederates were forcefully expelled, he seeks in his wrath against the Creator to totally deface the image of God from the lives of His children (Rev 12:17). To achieve these objectives Satan seeks inroads into people’s lives; means by which he can obtain a foothold, which could later become a stronghold, to gain total control or subordination of the human will to his whims and pleasures. Ultimately, as Jesus stated, his mission is to “kill, and steal, and destroy” (John 10:10). The beginning point for his objective is finding a foothold to obtain access into the lives of God’s creatures, for whom He sent His Son to die on the cross.

As a result of the great conflict which broke out in heaven (Rev 12:7-11), the devil and his evil angels were expelled from their former abode and became vagrants in need of new habitations. This problem was solved when the devil tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden to disobey God. By complying to the counsel of the deceiver, the earth’s dominion was ceded to the usurper (Gen 3). The fall of Adam and Eve occurred because the devil found a foothold, an entry point into the heart of Eve. This foothold was the sin of covetousness. Eve apparently coveted the adulation and

glory only God should have; she desired to be worshiped (v. 5). Eve was deceived by Satan who thereby gained control of her and subsequently used her as an agent to tempt Adam to join in the rebellion against God. Adam, on his part, apparently chose to join his wife in her disobedience rather than to obey God and live. In attempting to be godlike Adam and Eve lost their paradise home, their dominion over the entire creation, and their position as custodians of God's world entrusted to them. Intriguingly, the same unholy ambition which Satan had nursed—the desire to have the position, dominion, and glory belonging to the Creator—he transmitted to Adam and Eve.

### Battle for the Mind

Although the great conflict between God and Satan, light and darkness, truth and error began in heaven and culminated in a literal war (Rev 12:7-8), the Scriptures reveal a different phase of this age-old battle, which has morphed into a spiritual conflict. The new battleground is the human heart. The great controversy is now a battle for the will, with the people on this earth playing center stage for this drama of the universe. The war is all about control for dominion, and which kingdom humans choose to belong to. No one can claim neutrality; there is no middle ground.

In order to obtain total control of human subjects the devil first seeks footholds into their lives. A foothold can be explained as “a spot, place, location, room, home, position, tract, occasion, opportunity, locality, region, or condition” (Anderson n.d.). The Apostle Paul provides insight into the nature of the devil's footholds when he states: “And don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil” (Eph 4:26, 27). In this passage, Paul introduces one of the several channels, or means, by which the devil gains control over the human will—through anger. However, he also demonstrates that whatever human emotion is not mastered can become a portal by which demons gain control over a person.

It is also noteworthy that Paul states, “be angry, but sin not;” in other words, to be angry is not necessarily a sin. Evidently, it is when anger is not properly managed that it becomes a foothold for the devil. When anger is cherished and nurtured to the point that it becomes cancerous—resulting in bitterness—then the Spirit of the Lord is driven away and demons can have sway over the person, dictating what to do. On the contrary, when anger is surrendered to the Lord and the spirit of forgiveness embraced then the devil or his demons find no means to gain control over the individual.

## Footholds in the Lives of Selected Characters

A study of selected biblical biographies is illustrative of how the devil has historically found footholds in the lives of certain characters, with these stories providing lessons to be learned from them. The examples to be considered are from the experiences of Cain, Balaam, Samson, Solomon, and Judas. Additional comments from Ellen White on these characters serve to illuminate the lessons.

### Cain

One of the earliest and clearest cautions in Scripture against providing a foothold for the devil was given by God to Cain (Gen 4:6, 7). Sequel to the entry of sin into earth's pristine environment God announced to Adam and Eve the penalty and consequences for their rebellion, but also pronounced the promise of their redemption. A Savior was to be born who would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). As a sign of their acceptance of this divine means of salvation and of their allegiance to God, Cain and Abel were required by God to offer sacrifices to the Creator. While Abel obediently offered a sacrifice of the flock, Cain presented a sacrifice of the fruit from the field. The Lord accepted Abel's sacrifice but rejected Cain's, which caused Cain to become very angry. As a result, God gave the divine caution, "Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master" (Gen 4:6-7).

There are two explicit lessons God sought to convey to Cain from this passage. First, the reason for the rejection of his sacrifice lay in his wrong choice, his refusal to offer the right sacrifice. Second, Cain was warned that sin was crouching right at the door of his heart, personified as a stalker, seeking any opportunity to overcome him. It is noteworthy that the foothold into Cain's heart, which the devil exploited, was anger against his brother. However, God makes it clear that sin—in its myriad forms—is the main culprit.

Commenting on this incident, Ellen White provides the following insight regarding Cain's reaction to God's admonition:

Instead of acknowledging his sin, Cain continued to complain of the injustice of God and to cherish jealousy and hatred of Abel. He angrily reproached his brother, and attempted to draw him into controversy concerning God's dealings with them. In meekness, yet fearlessly and

firmly, Abel defended the justice and goodness of God. He pointed out Cain's error, and tried to convince him that the wrong was in himself. He pointed to the compassion of God in sparing the life of their parents when He might have punished them with instant death, and urged that God loved them, or He would not have given His Son, innocent and holy, to suffer the penalty that they had incurred. All this caused Cain's anger to burn the hotter. Reason and conscience told him that Abel was in the right; but he was enraged that one who had been wont to heed his counsel should now presume to disagree with him, and that he could gain no sympathy in his rebellion. In the fury of his passion he slew his brother. (White 2005d:74)

Rather than master the feelings of anger and resentment he felt towards his brother Abel, Cain succumbed to the demon of anger, allowing it to take control over him. The result was tragic—the first act of murder in human history, a fratricide.

Ellen White, however, traces the roots of Cain's transgression to the primal act of disobedience committed by the parents, Adam and Eve:

Made in the image of God, the human family lost their innocence, became transgressors, and as disloyal subjects began their downward career. Satan gained control of man's power of action. Through the senses he influenced the mind. Thus it has been from the beginning of the world. Instead of remaining under God's influence, in order that he might reflect the moral image of his Creator, man placed himself under the control of Satan's influence and was made selfish. Thus sin became a universal evil. And what a dreadful evil is sin! Yielding to Satan's suggestions, our first parents opened the floodgates of evil upon the world. The questionable principles of the father and the mother of the human race influenced some of those with whom they associated. The evil that began in Paradise has extended down through the ages. Although Adam and Eve related with sorrow to their children the sad story of the Fall, their family became a divided family. Cain chose to serve Satan, Abel to serve God. Cain killed his brother Abel, because he would not follow his example. (2008:41)

### Balaam

Balaam is another character whose experience reflects the terrible consequence of yielding a foothold in one's life to the devil. It is significant to note that very few prophets had God speak to them the way God did to Balaam in vision (Num 24:3-4). Also, it was the prophecy of Balaam that led the wise men (*magoi*) to Bethlehem at the birth of the Messiah (v. 17; Matt 2:1-3). Unfortunately, greed for profit was the foothold the

devil found in Balaam's heart. Departing from the pathway of righteousness, Balaam followed after the profits of unrighteousness (Jude 11; 2 Pet 2:15) and

"loved the wages of unrighteousness" 2 Peter 2:15. The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God. He tells them it is their overconscientiousness that keeps them from prosperity. Thus many are induced to venture out of the path of strict integrity. One wrong step makes the next easier, and they become more and more presumptuous. They will do and dare most terrible things when once they have given themselves to the control of avarice and a desire for power. Many flatter themselves that they can depart from strict integrity for a time, for the sake of some worldly advantage, and that having gained their object, they can change their course when they please. Such are entangling themselves in the snare of Satan, and it is seldom that they escape. (White 2005d:439)

Balaam's tragic story demonstrates the blindness and dumbness that can overcome even a prophet when the devil finds a foothold in a life. This is also graphically portrayed in the role-reversal which occurred when the prophet became blinded by dreams of wealth—he began to speak and act like an ass, while his ass spoke and acted like a prophet (Num 22:22-33). Eventually, rather than dying the death of a righteous man, which he sought (23:10), he was killed ignominiously by the conquering Israelite forces. Just as the devil found a foothold in Balaam's life through his craving for wealth and honor he seeks to control and dominate the lives of men and women today, whether godly or ungodly. He promises them, as he did to Balaam, wealth, fame, and worldly honor, and too many appear to give in to that temptation.

### Samson

The story of the Israelite judge, Samson, is another illustration of how when Satan gains access through a foothold in a person's life he can bring ruin and great destruction to a promising life. Samson was the original, authentic, superman. Lions could not stop him, chains could not bind him, and gates were no hindrance for him. He was a one-man army, a genuine superhero; however, the devil found a foothold in his heart through lust. By his constant lust for Philistine women the devil overcame Samson's scruples, disarmed, neutralized, and took captive the mighty warrior.

Ellen White states, “In the society of this enchantress, the judge of Israel squandered precious hours that should have been sacredly devoted to the welfare of his people. But the blinding passions which make even the strongest weak, had gained control of reason and of conscience” (1881:1).

### Solomon

The golden era of Israelite kingship flowered under the rule of Solomon. Solomon took over the reign from his father who had established the greatness of the Israelite nation. He went on to forge political and economic ties with the surrounding nations. Solomon had a favored status with God—he was named by God, Jedidiah, or beloved (2 Sam 12:24-25), and God in a dream revealed himself to the king asking him to request whatever he desired. His name and fame spread globally leading to the visit of the Queen of Sheba, who came to ascertain whether the stories she had heard about the glories of his kingdom were really true (1 Kgs 10:1-13). Twice in dreams the Lord appeared to Solomon, the first time promising him wisdom, wealth, and fame, and the second time giving him assurance of his continued presence if he remained faithful to God (3:5-15, 9:1-9).

Unfortunately, the devil found a foothold in Solomon’s life through his lust. His unrestrained love for women eventually led his heart away from God (1 Kgs 11:1-4). Ellen White ruefully observes,

The life of Solomon might have been remarkable until its close, if virtue had been preserved. But he surrendered this special grace to lustful passion. In his youth he looked to God for guidance and trusted in Him, and God chose for him and gave him wisdom that astonished the world. His power and wisdom were extolled throughout the land. But his love of women was his sin. This passion he did not control in his manhood, and it proved a snare to him. His wives led him into idolatry, and when he began to descend the declivity of life, the wisdom that God had given him was removed; he lost his firmness of character and became more like the giddy youth, wavering between right and wrong. Yielding his principles, he placed himself in the current of evil, and thus separated himself from God, the foundation and source of his strength. He had moved from principle. Wisdom had been more precious to him than the gold of Ophir. But, alas! lustful passions gained the victory. He was deceived and ruined by women. What a lesson for watchfulness! What a testimony as to the need of strength from God to the very last! (1923:582).

Ironically, as is evident from the accounts of the lives of Samson, David, and Solomon, the strongest, greatest, and wisest of leaders the nation of Israel ever had were brought low through lust—a foothold the devil found in their lives.

## Judas

During His life on earth, Jesus had an inner circle of twelve followers or disciples who were always with him. Judas was one of the apostles of Christ, those who were among the closest persons that lived and walked with the Savior. Despite his proximity to the Lord Judas permitted the devil to find a foothold in his heart through the lust for filthy lucre. The gospel writer, John, observes that although Judas enjoyed a position of high esteem among the apostles as the treasurer, he was a thief who often helped himself to the purse he controlled (John 12:6). Through this point of entry, the devil took control of Judas' life and eventually used him to betray Christ for the meager sum of 30 pieces of silver (John 13:26-27). Similar to the case of the apostate prophet Balaam, Judas traded his soul for money. Comparing John and Judas, Ellen White observes:

In striking contrast to the sanctification worked out in the life of John is the experience of his fellow disciple, Judas. Like his associate, Judas professed to be a disciple of Christ, but he possessed only a form of godliness. He was not insensible to the beauty of the character of Christ; and often, as he listened to the Savior's words, conviction came to him, but he would not humble his heart or confess his sins. By resisting the divine influence he dishonored the Master whom he professed to love. John warred earnestly against his faults; but Judas violated his conscience and yielded to temptation, fastening upon himself more securely his habits of evil. The practice of the truths that Christ taught was at variance with his desires and purposes, and he could not bring himself to yield his ideas in order to receive wisdom from heaven. Instead of walking in the light, he chose to walk in darkness. Evil desires, covetousness, revengeful passions, dark and sullen thoughts, were cherished until Satan gained full control of him. (2005a:557)

## Strongholds

In two major passages in his epistles Paul discusses the great conflict involving all Christians (Eph 4:24-26; 2 Cor 10:3-5) in which he provides insights into the strategies and devices of the devil and his demonic forces. Besides seeking for a foothold, the other way that the devil and his demons exercise control over humans is by establishing strongholds in the lives of their victims. What are these strongholds and how are they established? Paul explains, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every



thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:3-5, emphasis added). The word translated "strongholds" in this passage is a unique Greek expression that can also be rendered as "fortress." In other words, beyond establishing a foothold in the hearts and lives of humans in order to enfeeble their resistance to his control and to subsequently lead to their moral and spiritual destruction, the other strategy is to establish a stronghold, or fortress of resistance in their minds against everything godly or holy.

It seems clear from the passage what Paul is referring to as strongholds or fortresses. These are "arguments" (NKJV, NIV, NET), "speculations" (NASB), "human reasoning and false arguments" (NLT) that are in opposition to the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5).

Concerning the passage in question, it has been remarked that "the imagery is of a stronghold breached and those sheltering behind its walls taken captive. The apostle's purpose is not only to demolish false arguments, but also to bring people's thoughts under the Lordship of Christ" (Kruse 1987:174, 175). Human reasoning, philosophies, logic systems, and worldviews in opposition to the knowledge of God therefore seem to be what Paul is referring to. In other words, every belief system, assumption, or perception of reality contrary to the Word and will of God is here implied.

Fortunately, Paul reminds Christians that although these may constitute strongholds or fortresses in human minds, the weapons in the divine arsenal are formidable enough to destroy them. In contemporary imagery the passage brings to mind how explosives are employed by road construction engineers for blasting through rock formations and mountains in order to create a new path for a highway.

In ancient times, however, the fortress constituted the last bastion of defense and protection of a city. Once it was breached defeat was imminent. The fortress or stronghold was designed with a watchtower and lookout post but served primarily to keep invaders out; it was intended to be impregnable.

In the African context, strongholds could be regarded as those beliefs, philosophies, and worldviews in opposition to the Word of God, and to his divine will and purposes. These would include beliefs regarding the dead, reincarnation, the spirit world, and the power of the devil. Therefore, it is important for Christians to remember that at the cross, as Paul plainly demonstrates, Jesus destroyed the strongholds of Satan, disarmed principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, leading them captive in his victory procession (Col 2:15).

Other footholds that the devil can employ to gain entry, hold hostage, and exert complete control—becoming impenetrable strongholds in



human lives—include pornography and sex, alcohol and drugs, addictions of any kind, appetite (White 1901:1), rebellion (White 2005a:61), occult/sorcery (61), deception (White 1969:37, error/false doctrines (White 1973:589), worldly entertainments (White 2006:332), including receiving the glory due to God (White 1986:294). In other words, any habitual behavior, practice, or belief, contrary to the Word and will of God can provide a foothold into an individual's life and become a stronghold in opposition to the kingdom of God.

### Divine Strongholds

On one hand, Paul reminds Christians that enemy strongholds need to be demolished by employing the formidable weapons God has provided for taking as captives of war the devices of Satan. On the other hand, the Scriptures in several passages make it unambiguously clear that the Lord is a stronghold the righteous can flee to in order to find refuge and security (Ps 18:2, 31:3, 91:2, 144:2; 2 Sam 22:3). Against the relentless attacks of the enemy in the Great Controversy, and the devil's unabating efforts to control and have dominion over humans, the Christian's only refuge and defense is the Lord. When in earnestness and helplessness Christians cry to the Lord in prayer they can be sure help will be sent to withstand the fiery attacks of the devil. Divine assistance is always available to those who sense their weakness and inadequacy and reach out to the Lord for power. Ministering angels will also be sent to strengthen them, as in the temptations Jesus endured in the wilderness (Heb 1:14; Matt 4:1-11).

The other related divine stronghold the Bible presents is the name of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, the impotent were healed (Acts 3:6), signs and wonders were performed (Acts 4: 28-30), demonic spirits cast out (Acts 16:18), and in the end of time every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess the Lordship of Jesus (Phil 2:10-11). A note of caution, however, is necessary for the name of Jesus is not magical, as the sons of Sceva discovered (Acts 19:13-16). In their attempt to exorcize a demon they were under the false assumption that all they needed to do was to mention the name of Jesus and the demon would depart. Unfortunately, because they had no relationship with Jesus they were routed by the demon and managed to escape naked with serious bruises and a thorough trouncing. Despite this traumatic encounter God demonstrated through Paul's ministry the power in the name of Jesus over every demonic stronghold of the devil.

The apostle Paul, in his labors at Ephesus, was given special tokens of divine favor. The power of God accompanied his efforts, and many were healed of physical maladies. God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick

handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. These manifestations of supernatural power were far more potent than had ever before been witnessed in Ephesus, and were of such a character that they could not be imitated by the skill of the juggler or the enchantments of the sorcerer. As these miracles were wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the people had opportunity to see that the God of heaven was more powerful than the magicians who were worshipers of the goddess Diana. (White 2005a:286)

Another notion that emerges from a study of the Scriptures is that *the way of the Lord* is a divine stronghold against demonic influences and attacks (Prov 10:29). Safety and security is found only as God's people walk in his way, in obedience to his will, keeping his commandments.

### The Role of the Will

In the course of his itinerant ministry Jesus once encountered two demoniacs who lived in the tombs. Several times chains had been used to bind them, but they always managed to break loose (Matt 8:28-34). Ellen White explains that these men, in their abject depravity, represent precisely what the devil would like to do with everyone who yields their will to the control of demons. "The encounter with the demoniacs of Gergesa had a lesson for the disciples. It showed the depths of degradation to which Satan is seeking to drag the whole human race, and the mission of Christ to set men free from his power. Those wretched beings, dwelling in the place of graves, possessed by demons, in bondage to uncontrolled passions and loathsome lusts, represent what humanity would become if given up to satanic jurisdiction" (2005b:341).

Notice a similar warning:

There are multitudes today as truly under the power of evil spirits as was the demoniac of Capernaum. All who willfully depart from God's commandments are placing themselves under the control of Satan. Many a man tampers with evil, thinking that he can break away at pleasure; but he is lured on and on, until he finds himself controlled by a will stronger than his own. He cannot escape its mysterious power. Secret sin or master passion may hold him a captive as helpless as was the demoniac of Capernaum. (White 1958:312)

Therefore, each individual has to make a decision to allow or deny demons access to their lives and to live in them. The will needs to be exercised to resist the evil one.

The tempter can never compel us to do evil. He cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control. The will must consent, faith must let go its hold upon Christ, before Satan can exercise his power upon us. But every sinful desire we cherish affords him a foothold. Every point in which we fail of meeting the divine standard is an open door by which he can enter to tempt and destroy us. And every failure or defeat on our part gives occasion for him to reproach Christ. (White 1958:125)

As God's people prepare for the second advent Christ's example must be their standard; in Christ the devil found no foothold, no entry point with which to control Him (John 14:30).

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Savior be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble. (White 2005c:623)

The call therefore to all is for a life of soberness and vigilance realizing that the enemy is like a lion that is constantly on the prowl seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8, 9). As a result, effort is necessary on the part of all to resist the devil, and to shut up every avenue by which he may gain entry and control of lives.

The Christian life is a warfare, not against believing brethren, but against the seducing spirit of the enemy, against the subtle, deceiving influence of the serpent, which creeps into our thoughts and minds. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Make no provision for the flesh, to deceive, to falsify, to work just as Satan worked in Eden. He is watching his chance to develop if he can only have an opportunity. Give him no foothold. There is something we are charged to do: "Resist the devil," and the promise is, "he will flee from you." Why? Because the angel of God lifts up for you a standard against the enemy, and he flees. (White 1905:327)

## Conclusion

In his second epistle to the Corinthian church Paul declared that he would not want the saints to be ignorant regarding the devices of the evil one so that the devil might not take advantage of them (2 Cor 2:11). Among the battle strategies the devil employs against Christians and in the great cosmic conflict are the establishment of footholds and strongholds in human lives. It is the duty of every child of God to resist in the following ways:

1. Carefully block access of your hearts by the devil so that no entry point may be established. In our age this includes caution in the use of modern technology, social media, and various entertainment platforms that could become access points for the devil (Prov 4:23).
2. Daily study and obedience to Scriptures help realign our lives with the will of God. By employing the power found in the Gospels every stronghold of the devil may be breached and destroyed and every thought brought under subjection to the Lordship of Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5).
3. The weapons in the Christian arsenal include the Word of God and prayer. Through the power of prayer the seemingly impregnable strongholds of the enemy can be destroyed and captives set free.
4. Believers can find safety and security behind the unassailable divine strongholds of the Lord by abiding in Christ (John 15:1-7; Rom 8:1-2) and putting on Christ (Rom 13:14; Col 3:5-10). As Christians walk the narrow way, and regularly practice Christian disciplines they will find freedom in Christ and thereby escape the footholds of demons and the strongholds of the devil.
5. Exceeding, great, and precious promises have also been provided for God's people to live victorious lives and escape the snares of the devil (2 Pet 1:4). Furthermore, God has promised to rescue captives from the hands of the warrior, even those who sold themselves into captivity, and God will deliver his children who call out to him for help (Isa 49:24-25).

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Professor Kelvin Onongha, obtained his PhD and Doctor of Ministry degrees from the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Prior to his present leadership position he served as the chair of the Practical Theology department with oversight of the MA Missiology & PhD program in World Missions at the Adventist University of Africa, Kenya (AUA). He also coordinated the Doctor of Ministry programs at AUA. He currently serves as the president/vice chancellor of the Adventist University of Central Africa, Rwanda.